

supposedly dragged this country to the brink of collapse. But what they have ignored in their manufactured hysteria and disgust in some part is the fact that it is, indeed, Democrats who have control of the entire U.S. Government at this point. It was the Democrats who chose to govern alone starting on day one of the Biden administration.

Over the past 8 months, Joe Biden and his Democratic friends have indulged their worst instincts and taken unprecedented steps to bring every single aspect of American life under the control of the Federal Government.

They are the ones who are now threatening the American people with shutdowns and default rather than using the tools at their disposal to raise the debt ceiling and fund the government.

They are the ones who chose to squander the trust of the American people on a spending spree that would waste trillions of dollars on liberal pet projects and a rapidly expanding welfare state. The Democrats have repeatedly claimed that these programs will make us happier, healthier, wealthier, freer, but in reality, their agenda has done nothing but make things worse.

Historic spending has given rise to historic inflation that is on track to stay with us until the end of Joe Biden's Presidency. In Tennessee, it is one of the things that I hear about most. Groceries are more expensive than ever. Gas prices are at a 7-year high. Rent has skyrocketed, along with natural gas prices, which are set to break a decade-old record just in time for colder weather to set in. It is bad for hard-working taxpayers. They are tired of it.

According to the Wall Street Journal, not even a well-earned hourly raise will be enough to pull these workers out of the hole. Inflation is so bad, it has negated the budget padding these people should be enjoying from bigger paychecks. Pay adjusted for inflation actually fell. It fell half a percent in August. These aren't luxuries. The policies advocated by the Democrats have made life itself too expensive to afford. From the second they wake up in the morning to the moment their head hits their pillow at night, the American people are bleeding cash, paying higher taxes, and some are beginning to lose hope.

Still, the Democrats insist that if we surrender even more control, all will be well. Well, that talking point might work when you are talking to the camera, but it is not going to work on the people. It is not working on Tennesseans because they understand that ceding control means surrendering freedom, and freedom is about all that we have left.

When I talk to Tennesseans, they are not holding back how they feel about this so-called transformative agenda. For them, this isn't just a battle of ideas. They are fighting a war against the onslaught of radical socialism. They are afraid of Joe Biden's runaway

White House because they have seen how destructive the administration's unilateral decisions can be. They have watched thousands of jobs evaporate and the southern border turned into a lawless war zone because the President wanted it this way.

So here is what Tennesseans want to know. If they can't trust the Democrats to do the bare minimum, why should they trust that even more spending and more centralized control and more big government will work out in their favor? They have had 8 months' worth of proof that the exact opposite is true.

This country might be hanging on by a thread. For my part, I will listen to my fellow Tennesseans and will play no role in facilitating the erosion of freedom and the dignity of American life.

I implore my colleagues in the majority: Listen to the people. They have the right to live their lives on their own terms, not with lockdowns and mandates—on their terms. They don't want have to depend on a government check to feed themselves or get their children back to school.

There is a reason that our Constitution is one of the enumerated Federal powers. It is not the place of Congress or the Executive to flip this concept on its head and force the American people to justify their right to live free from this destructive cycle of debt and dependency. Our rights come from God, and I assure you, no government body could ever improve upon them.

I yield the floor.

VOTE ON KRITENBRINK NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Kritenbrink nomination?

Mr. SCHATZ. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Mrs. FEINSTEIN), the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), and the Senator from Maryland (Mr. VAN HOLLEN) are necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. BURR), the Senator from Montana (Mr. DAINES), the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE), the Senator from Wisconsin (Mr. JOHNSON), the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. KENNEDY), the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MORAN), the Senator from Idaho (Mr. RISCH), the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. ROUNDS), the Senator from Florida (Mr. SCOTT), the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS), and the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. TOOMEY).

The result was announced—yeas 72, nays 14, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 379 Ex.]

YEAS—72

Baldwin	Grassley	Ossoff
Barrasso	Hagerty	Padilla
Bennet	Hassan	Peters
Blackburn	Heinrich	Portman
Blumenthal	Hickenlooper	Reed
Blunt	Hirono	Romney
Booker	Hoeven	Rosen
Brown	Hyde-Smith	Schatz
Cantwell	Kaine	Schumer
Capito	Kelly	Scott (SC)
Cardin	King	Shaheen
Carper	Klobuchar	Shelby
Casey	Lankford	Sinema
Collins	Leahy	Smith
Coons	Lujan	Stabenow
Cornyn	Lummis	Sullivan
Cortez Masto	Manchin	Tester
Cramer	Markey	Warner
Crapo	McConnell	Warnock
Duckworth	Menendez	Warren
Durbin	Merkley	Whitehouse
Fischer	Murkowski	Wicker
Gillibrand	Murphy	Wyden
Graham	Murray	Young

NAYS—14

Boozman	Ernst	Rubio
Braun	Hawley	Sasse
Cassidy	Lee	Thune
Cotton	Marshall	Tuberville
Cruz	Paul	

NOT VOTING—14

Burr	Kennedy	Scott (FL)
Daines	Moran	Tillis
Feinstein	Risch	Toomey
Inhofe	Rounds	Van Hollen
Johnson	Sanders	

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KAINE). Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 333, Karen Erika Donfried, of the District of Columbia, to be an Assistant Secretary of State (European Affairs and Eurasian Affairs).

Charles E. Schumer, Robert Menendez, Patrick J. Leahy, Patty Murray, Maria Cantwell, Sheldon Whitehouse, Brian Schatz, Debbie Stabenow, Catherine Cortez Masto, Christopher A. Coons, Ron Wyden, Margaret Wood Hassan, Edward J. Markey, Benjamin L. Cardin, Richard J. Durbin, Tina Smith, Elizabeth Warren, Angus S. King, Jr.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Karen Erika Donfried, of the District of Columbia, to be an Assistant Secretary of State (European Affairs and Eurasian Affairs), shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Mrs. FEINSTEIN), the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), and the Senator from Maryland (Mr. VAN HOLLEN) are necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. BURR), the Senator from Montana (Mr. DAINES), the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE), the Senator from Wisconsin (Mr. JOHNSON), the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. KENNEDY), the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MORAN), the Senator from Idaho (Mr. RISCH), the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. ROUNDS), the Senator from Florida (Mr. SCOTT), the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS), and the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. TOOMEY).

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 65, nays 21, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 380 Ex.]

YEAS—65

Baldwin	Gillibrand	Padilla
Barrasso	Graham	Peters
Bennet	Grassley	Portman
Blackburn	Hassan	Reed
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Romney
Blunt	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Booker	Hirono	Schatz
Brown	Hoeven	Schumer
Cantwell	Kaine	Scott (SC)
Capito	Kelly	Shaheen
Cardin	King	Shelby
Carpenter	Klobuchar	Sinema
Casey	Leahy	Smith
Collins	Lujan	Stabenow
Coons	Manchin	Tester
Cornyn	Markey	Warner
Cortez Masto	Menendez	Warnock
Cramer	Merkley	Warren
Crapo	Murkowski	Whitehouse
Duckworth	Murphy	Wyden
Durbin	Murray	Young
Fischer	Ossoff	

NAYS—21

Boozman	Hawley	Paul
Braun	Hyde-Smith	Rubio
Cassidy	Lankford	Sasse
Cotton	Lee	Sullivan
Cruz	Lummis	Thune
Ernst	Marshall	Tuberville
Hagerty	McConnell	Wicker

NOT VOTING—14

Burr	Kennedy	Scott (FL)
Daines	Moran	Tillis
Feinstein	Risch	Toomey
Inhofe	Rounds	Van Hollen
Johnson	Sanders	

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 65, the nays are 21.

The motion is agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, the United States has suffered a grave humiliation in Afghanistan. President Biden's disastrous withdrawal has brought shame to a nation that fought, bled, and sacrificed for two long decades after September 11.

Defeat can be imposed by an enemy, but humiliation is self-inflicted. In this case, it was inflicted on America by the President of the United States.

To the thousands of Americans who fought bravely in Afghanistan, I share your dismay, and I want to tell you this was not your fault. This failure was not caused by our exceptional

troops, who fought with courage and skill against a determined and ruthless enemy. Our warriors lost no battles and surrendered to no enemy. They fought from the highest summits of American armed conflict and descended under the darkest pits of evil. Our men and women in uniform made us proud and filled us with awe. This loss is not their loss.

The debacle in Afghanistan was also not the fault of our people. The American people contributed hundreds of billions of dollars to a just cause and endured a prolonged conflict for almost a generation.

No, our people and our warriors did not fail. Our leaders did, and none failed more conspicuously than a Commander in Chief who could not command events.

Joe Biden has been paving the path to ruin for over a decade. Many have been wrong about the war in Afghanistan, but few have been more wrong, more consistently than this President.

During the Obama administration, Joe Biden wrongly argued that America could strike terrorists from over the horizon, wrongly set a public timeline for withdrawing our troops, and wrongly opposed a secret mission to kill Osama Bin Laden. Then he stood by when President Obama released several high-value Taliban officials from Guantanamo Bay in exchange for an American traitor, Bowe Bergdahl.

Joe Biden extended his perfect record of terrible judgment. He was wrong about evacuating Bagram Air Base, wrong about the likelihood that the Taliban would take over Afghanistan, and wrong that the Taliban cared about its international reputation.

He also believed wrongly—incredibly—that we could trust the Taliban to secure the Kabul airport and help us evacuate our people.

The President's inexhaustible ineptitude has created this fiasco. According to official estimates, over 100 Americans and thousands of green card holders are currently stranded in a country run by terrorists. The much-vaunted airlift that the President pretends is an “extraordinary success”—in his words—evacuated fewer than half of approved special immigrant visa holders. That includes thousands of Afghans who fought loyally alongside our troops and have now been abandoned to torture and execution at the hands of the Taliban.

The allies of al-Qaida now rule in Kabul; the Taliban is armed with billions of dollars of U.S. military equipment; and those Guantanamo Bay detainees released under the Obama administration now serve in the highest levels of the Afghan Government.

My office has received many firsthand reports of Taliban insurgents going house to house, hunting for American allies. Former Afghan pilots are especially high-risk targets who are being tracked down and brutally murdered; and, of course, we have all

seen the disturbing videos of desperate Afghans clinging to an American transport plane and plummeting to their deaths on the tarmac below.

I will admit I had low expectations for Joe Biden's Presidency, yet he still failed to meet them.

When I served in Afghanistan, I saw the Taliban's grim handiwork up close. I witnessed the sacrifices of brave Americans and Afghans to prevent them from regaining power. So when this disaster unfolded, I was determined to do whatever I could to get our people to safety.

Soon after the fall of Kabul, my office established an email hotline for evacuation requests, created a war room to help those in need, and established contact with assets on the ground.

Members of my team did everything from providing required forms and up-to-date information to helping orchestrate daring midnight evacuations. We facilitated the escape of high-ranking members of the Afghan Government and military, along with wounded children and pregnant mothers, several of whom were being actively hunted by Taliban death squads.

We also helped dozens of students from a Christian missionary school reach safety before they suffered the cruel treatment that Islamic terrorists reserve for so-called apostates, or followers, of the gospel.

My staff worked around the clock, volunteering their time and energy and, on several occasions, their own resources to help those in need. One aide repeatedly drove to Dulles Airport to deliver clothes to needy Afghans. Another sent school supplies to a recently returned second grader.

All of us heard harrowing stories from the ground. A member of my team was on the phone with an American citizen as the Taliban thugs attacked her and brutally assaulted her driver on their way to the airport. The same woman was on the phone with my office, outside the Kabul airport, when Taliban guards started shooting in the air, causing a stampede. Luckily, thanks to the cooperation of my staff, military personnel at the gate were able to pull her to safety before she was potentially crushed by the stampeding mob.

I would remind the Senate that Joe Biden and Tony Blinken empowered the men who beat and then almost killed an American citizen while a member of my office was literally on the phone with her.

The extraordinary efforts of my staffs in Washington and Arkansas produced exceptional results. From the beginning of the crisis to today, we have contacted more than 2,500 individuals seeking assistance, and we have helped more than 300 American citizens and legal permanent residents to safely evacuate, along with over 200 other vulnerable Afghans, many of whom were the immediate family of those Americans and permanent residents.

I want to thank my staff for their incredible and selfless work. I sincerely believe that these actions have redeemed, in some measure, the honor and trust that President Biden squandered this past month. I also want to acknowledge the many other aides—Democratic and Republican, House and Senate—who also pitched in to help our fellow citizens.

But, for every tale of sacrifice, daring, and courage that ended in a plane ride to safety, there were also tales of tragedy, heartbreak, and failure. Unfortunately, many of the wounds that we suffered during the Afghan withdrawal were, once again, self-inflicted. Those of us involved in the rescue effort had a front-row seat to the Biden administration's ineptitude. I think it is worth recounting some of those stories as well.

On one notable occasion, my office was contacted by a group of three American women who had traveled to a site that was reportedly being used to shuttle people to the airport for evacuation. When they arrived, a group of Taliban fighters pointed guns in their faces and refused to let them pass. The women called a member of my staff for help, who promptly called the State Department for guidance.

The State Department's initial response to Americans held at gunpoint was to ask whether they had filled out an online form to request evacuation. When my aide pressed the matter further, the State Department told them: "Our best advice is not to give advice."

This casual indifference to the plight of American citizens was, regrettably, not an isolated incident.

On a separate occasion, my staff learned that a State Department employee told an American citizen who refused to leave Afghanistan without her family that she was "being really annoying right now."

I suppose she was just one more inconvenient American spoiling Joe Biden's extraordinary success.

On another occasion, I received a phone call from the Ambassador of a country in the region. His government wanted to know what to do about dozens of American-trained Afghan soldiers and their families who had fled to his country in order to escape the Taliban. The only problem was the Ambassador's government couldn't get any senior official from the White House or the State Department to return their calls, not so much as a "thank you"; "please hold what you have got"; "we will be back to help you soon." It was radio silence from America while the Taliban continued to demand the return of those troops.

Thankfully, I was able to work with Senator COONS to get the message to the administration. After much confusion and delay, the State Department official finally returned the Ambassador's call. I want to thank Senator COONS for his assistance. The episode is a reminder that this body still works and bipartisanship is possible even when the stakes are high.

Even some members of the executive branch have acknowledged that the administration's policies have been a catastrophe. On more than one occasion, my staff has received calls from officials in the government asking for our help to evacuate people from Afghanistan. In other words, members of the executive branch of the most powerful Nation on Earth were going to a lone, freelancing Senate office for help instead of to their own State Department or their own White House.

President Biden has refused to lead and refused to protect those he took an oath to protect, so it fell to the rest of us to shoulder the load and get these Americans to safety. Thankfully, Americans remain a generous and courageous people. We stepped up to meet this moment.

Over the past few weeks, countless normal citizens volunteered to help people they had never met. Veterans reunited for one last mission to help their old battle buddies get to safety, and, of course, thousands of American troops risked their lives to help others in a distant land far from home. Thirteen of them made the ultimate sacrifice on the noble mission to rescue their countrymen, who will never forget their sacrifice, nor will we. They performed bravely a job that they never should have had to perform.

Joe Biden's Afghanistan crisis will live in infamy as one of the worst strategic blunders in our Nation's history, but the response of so many Americans to save their fellow citizens and their allies showed the very best of our country. I am proud that my office was able to play some small part in that redemptive story.

Poor leadership comes and goes, but our national character endures. Americans have shown that we are still capable of noble and heroic deeds even—and maybe especially—when politicians in Washington fail in their duty. Our Nation is still exceptional even if our President is a mediocrity.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

FREEDOM TO VOTE ACT

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, we have been in session now for about 11 hours, and we have taken up a handful of non-controversial nominees.

The reason?

The abuse by the Republicans of the rules of the Senate—filibuster after filibuster that require cloture votes—so we spend several hours on each of these nominations.

Even worse, the Republicans have abused the rules of the Senate to deny us in the Senate the ability to consider critical legislation that we should be taking up and acting on. There are many, many examples. I will just cite a few.

Justice in Policing: We are all committed to reforming our criminal justice system and our police system in order to deal with the values of our Nation. I know that Senator BOOKER has

worked tirelessly on this issue. We should be able to debate that bill on the floor of the U.S. Senate, but, no, the Republicans will require a cloture vote and will not give us the votes even to consider that legislation.

Or consider gun safety, which we have been debating in the public now for decades, and the Republicans are continuing to use the rules of the Senate to deny the Senate the opportunity to take up issues and debate issues and see whether we can come together.

Or take immigration reform, where we see the tragedies that are occurring where we need to take action as a Senate, but, no, the Republicans won't give us the votes so we can get on a bill and debate issues and take up amendments and see whether we can't get something done on immigration.

And now they are threatening to use the filibuster on the legislation that would extend the debt ceiling so that we don't default on our debt in regard to moneys that have been spent with the initiation and support of our Republican colleagues. They are threatening to deny us the opportunity to take up that bill and vote on it by the use of the filibuster, even though they were the ones who created the spending and debt.

Or take the continuation of our government.

But top on my list is safeguarding our election system, the bedrock of our democracy. On two occasions, Senate Democrats voted unanimously to simply begin debate on protecting the right to vote in our democracy, which has come under sustained assault in the aftermath of the 2020 elections. Both times, all Senate Republicans blocked even beginning the debate on this critical legislation. Senate Republicans put gridlock and partisanship before the rights of voters.

The Senate is being blocked from having the chance to consider options and amendments and do what the Founding Fathers intended us to do—legislate.

So my Senate Republican colleagues will have another chance to do the right thing, thanks to Leader SCHUMER and Senator KLOBUCHAR. Over the August recess, they worked diligently to come up with compromise legislation that still preserves the essential elements of S. 1, the For the People Act, that has already passed the House of Representatives.

President Biden was absolutely correct that we need to enact voting rights legislation to repair the damage done by the Supreme Court to the Voting Rights Act. President Biden rightly called efforts to limit ballot access across the country as the 21st century Jim Crow assault. He warned Americans that the Republicans' efforts to restrict voting rights as a result of their selfish challenge of the 2020 election results were the most significant tests of our democracy since the Civil War.

Indeed, my colleagues witnessed firsthand the violent insurrection at

the Capitol when the mob attacked, injured, and killed our brave Capitol Police officers, who put their lives on the line to preserve our very democracy and Union.

In many States, legislatures and Governors have responded to the falsehoods of the 2020 elections by restricting voting accessibility. The Big Lie, repeated by President Trump, has directly led to the disenfranchisement and suppression of the right to vote for millions of Americans.

I urge my colleagues and my fellow American citizens to reflect on the state of our democracy and the rights we hold dear. A blatant attempt to falsify an election and a persistent effort to deny the American people access to the ballot box has undermined the freedom and liberty that so many Americans have fought to defend and advance.

Voting rights is a fundamental issue of importance to a democratic country. After elections are over and we win, we celebrate. We celebrate the fact that we have gotten the support of the majority of voters, and that is what democracy is all about. If we don't win—and I think many of us have been involved in campaigns where our candidates were not successful—we go to work to try to attract more voters in the next election so we can celebrate a victory.

That is what participation in a free society is all about. That is what democracies are about. In repressive, autocratic regimes, they never accept the will of the people, so they look at ways in which they can undermine the voting record—what the voters want to do and the voters' will.

In the 2020 elections, we should all celebrate the record number of people who cast their ballot. It was a record and the most ever Americans casting their votes for the Presidency of the United States.

There were repeated reviews done by both Democrats and Republicans at the Federal, State, and local level. It all verified the simple fact that there was no widespread corruption or election fraud. The will of the people prevailed, and Joe Biden and Kamala Harris were duly elected.

Congress and Vice President Pence counted the electoral votes for President and Vice President and did their duty under the Constitution on January 6, notwithstanding the armed insurrection in the Capitol.

But that did not stop former President Trump from promoting the Big Lie. As a result of that, several States have now taken action to make it harder for people to cast their votes. The Brennan Center has pointed out that we have seen the worst assault on voting rights since Jim Crow.

So what have these laws done? Made it more difficult for voters to vote by mail, recognizing that for many voters they prefer to vote by mail. We have States that have had 100 percent voting by mail. There have been no indica-

tions of fraud in voting by mail. States have shortened the time for requesting mail-in ballots for voting, making it more difficult for individuals to be able to vote by mail, requiring certain requirements to vote by mail, making it more difficult to deliver their mail ballots, limiting the availability of ballot drop boxes.

Why did States take these actions? Because it makes it more difficult for people who are likely to vote for their political opponents to vote. That is what these State legislatures were doing. Stricter signature requirements, making in-person voting more difficult, purging voter rolls simply because a person did not vote, and, again, making it more difficult for people to vote. That should have no place in a democracy.

And it goes on and on in terms of the types of legislation that have already passed or is currently being considered by many State legislatures around our country. Making it more difficult to register to vote, making it more difficult to vote, targeting potential voters more likely to vote for their opponents, targeting minorities, young voters, and older minority voters is a disturbing trend we see across this country and has no place in our democracy.

The Freedom to Vote Act provides a basic Federal floor on protection of the right to vote. This legislation includes commonsense items such as automatic and online voter registration, uniform early voting, same-day voter registration, vote-by-mail and drop box standards and uniform national standards for voter identification.

These are simple voter protection measures against the actions being taken by State legislatures that are aimed at certain demographic groups and set a Federal floor.

The Freedom to Vote Act ends political gerrymandering. I don't know how many of my colleagues can defend the way that legislative and congressional lines are drawn today. Congressional districts should represent the communities' interests, not an individual Congressman's interests.

The Freedom to Vote Act takes a major step forward in ending political gerrymandering by creating non-partisan redistricting reform and banning partisan gerrymandering and allowing States to choose how to develop redistricting plans, including having an independent redistricting commission.

In terms of election integrity, the Freedom to Vote Act requires voter-verified paper ballots, reliable audits, and voting system upgrades. I think we all would agree that we want to be able to verify votes. The only way we can is if there is a paper trail, and it provides for that paper trail.

The measure takes steps to prevent State election subversion to better insulate State and local officials who administer Federal elections, after the attempts by both domestic and foreign interference in the 2020 election results.

This legislation reduces the dominance of Big Money in the political system. It does this in a couple ways. One, disclosure. How can anyone be against the disclosure of who is putting money into our political system? And, secondly, by providing a way in which we can weaken the dependence on large special interest dollars.

The legislation requires super PACs, 501(c)(4) groups, and other organizations spending money on elections to disclose donors and shuts down the use of transfers between organizations to cloak the identity of contributors.

It ensures that political ads sold online have the same transparency and disclosure requirements as ads sold on TV, radio, and satellite.

S. 2747 includes two provisions I authored. First, it includes the Democracy Restoration Act, which deals with laws passed after the end of slavery in an effort to prevent African Americans from voting. There are States that passed laws back then that are still on the books that disqualify for a lifetime a person convicted of a felony. The definition of a felony is pretty general in many States, so we have States where one out of five African Americans have been disqualified from voting because of their conviction of a felony, even though they are fully part of our society today. They don't have the right to vote. We need to remove that disqualification on voting.

I am pleased that my Deceptive Practices and Voter Intimidation Prevention Act is included as a provision in the legislation. The spreading of false or misleading information intended to suppress voting and intimidate the electorate remains one of the most regularly employed and effective methods used to keep individuals, particularly Black Americans and other racial minorities, from voting.

Advancement in communications, including the rise of social media platforms, have made it easier for bad actors to use these strategies. For example, the targeting of Latino voters in Florida with disinformation was widely documented. This provision prohibits individuals from knowingly deceiving others about the time, place, eligibility, or procedures of participating in a Federal election.

It criminalizes efforts to intentionally hinder, interfere with, or prevent any person from voting, registering to vote, or aiding a person to vote or register to vote.

My friend and former colleague was the late John Lewis of Georgia. The two of us were elected to the House of Representatives on the same day. In an editorial published after his death, Representative Lewis called an important lesson taught—recalled an important lesson taught by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. And I quote our former colleague when he said:

Each of us has a moral obligation to stand up, speak up, and speak out. When you see something that is not right, you must say something. You must do something. Democracy is not a state. It is an act. And each generation must do its part.

Well, we cannot take action if we don't start. And we cannot start unless my colleagues allow us to proceed to this issue on the floor of the U.S. Senate.

I urge my colleagues not to filibuster the right of the U.S. Senate to start the debate on protecting voter integrity, where each Member will have the opportunity to debate the issue and, collectively, we can come together.

Many of my colleagues have offered suggestions about how we can further improve S. 2747, how we can make it even a broader consensus.

Let's build on the work done by Senator KLOBUCHAR and her colleagues over the August recess. But we cannot do that unless we have the right to proceed to a debate.

I urge my colleagues to support taking up the Freedom to Vote Act, which is a critical issue to the preservation of our democracy and the integrity of our right to vote.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. OSSOFF). The Senator from Texas.

NORD STREAM 2

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, I would like to discuss now how Nord Stream 2 is an unprecedented example, a contemporary example, of bipartisan unity. Democrats and Republicans both know that Nord Stream 2 is a terrible idea. It is a terrible idea for Europe, and it is a terrible idea for the United States.

Here are several examples of the bipartisan agreement we have. It has been commonplace to say that bipartisanship doesn't exist, but Nord Stream 2 refutes that.

The first wave of sanctions authored by me and by Senator SHAHEEN goes back to the summer of 2019. At a July 31 hearing, several Democrats spoke out against Nord Stream 2 and its support of the Cruz-Shaheen sanctions to stop it.

Here are some of the things they said. Senator MENENDEZ said:

I think the international community must stand firm against opening more doors and creating new opportunities for further Kremlin aggression in Ukraine leading to the loss of life. The Russian Federation has repeatedly used its energy resources as a lever of power, and I believe Nord Stream 2 is no exception. Not only will it considerably strengthen the Kremlin's stranglehold on Europe, but it allows Moscow to further undermine Ukraine's sovereignty and stability.

Senator SHAHEEN said:

We have heard in our office directly from other countries in Eastern and Central Europe, and the Baltics, and many of the Nordic states, and of course especially Ukraine, who understand that this pipeline is an effort to increase reliance on Russia among Europe. And I would argue that this does nothing to strengthen the transatlantic alliance, the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. In fact, it actually decreases support for the alliance.

Here is what Senator COONS from Delaware said:

I, like many of us, have been to Ukraine, remain gravely concerned about Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine, and the

ways in which Russia finances its aggression through the use of its sole remaining export of any interest, which is energy.

Senator MENENDEZ was right. Senator SHAHEEN was right. Senator COONS was right. That consensus has held for over 2 years, Democrats and Republicans, even through the Biden administration's catastrophic decision to green light the pipeline and to give a multibillion-dollar gift to Vladimir Putin.

This issue was central to a June 8 meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee after Biden had defied U.S. law and given a multibillion-dollar gift to Putin.

Here is what Senator MENENDEZ said after Biden acted:

I think many of us on a bipartisan basis were deeply concerned about the administration's decision to waive sanctions on Nord Stream 2 AG. . . . I would have thought that one of the most significant ways to show strength is to ensure that the pipeline is killed.

Senator MENENDEZ was right.

Senator MERKLEY even condemned the pipeline for issues he said were directly related to climate change, which is something Biden officials claim is utterly sacrosanct in this administration.

The consensus, even after the Biden administration formally announced that it had struck a deal surrendering entirely to Russia on the pipeline—nonetheless, we saw the bipartisan consensus remain.

On July 21, Senator KAINE said:

I'm not happy about it. . . . I'm not happy about it in terms of Russian politics, and I'm not happy about it in terms of climate change.

Senator KAINE was right.

Senator SHAHEEN said she was "skeptical that [the agreement] will be sufficient when the key player at the table—Russia—refuses to play by the rules."

Senator SHAHEEN was right. She was right to be skeptical that the agreement from the Biden administration, mind you, will be sufficient when the key player at the table—Russia—refuses to play by the rules.

And I would note that the consensus wasn't limited to the Senate. On the other side of the Capitol in the U.S. House of Representatives, that same sentiment was broadly echoed both during the previous administration and during the current administration.

At the beginning of my push for the Cruz-Shaheen sanctions in 2019, Democratic Representative ENGEL said:

Russia has weaponized its energy resources, expanding into European markets and creating greater and greater dependency, particularly with projects such as the Nord Stream 2.

Representative ENGEL was right.

Several years later, after the announcement of President Biden's complete surrender to Russia on Nord Stream 2, Representative KAPTUR told a Polish newspaper that she and much of the House of Representatives were disappointed with the deal. She said:

I am very disappointed by the Biden administration's willingness to allow Russian gas to reach the heart of Europe via Nord Stream 2, endangering energy security. . . . We consider this a dangerous project from a security point of view.

Representative KAPTUR was right.

Supporters of the Biden administration will say: Well, of course, everybody opposes Nord Stream 2, but there is no way to stop it.

That excuse is disingenuous. That excuse is laughable on its face. Now, why is that? Because it is the identical excuse that was central to the Russian disinformation 2 years ago. In the summer of 2019, when I first authored the bipartisan sanctions to stop Nord Stream 2, the Russian disinformation campaign in Europe was predicated on the proposition that the pipeline was 95 percent complete, and they said: Gosh, you can't stop it. There is nothing you can do to stop it.

They halted construction of the pipeline 15 minutes before our bipartisan sanctions were signed into law, and for over a year, the pipeline lay dormant as a hunk of metal at the bottom of the sea.

So every time the Biden administration says "It was too far along; we couldn't stop it," you know what—it was just as far along in December of 2019, and we stopped it then. It was just as far along in January of 2020, and we stopped it then. We stopped it in February. We stopped it in March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, December. And it wasn't until January, January 24—4 days after Joe Biden took the oath of office—that Russia resumed building the Nord Stream 2 Pipeline.

The only reason they couldn't stop it is because Joe Biden wanted to surrender to Putin, because the answer is, Republicans and Democrats in this Chamber had stopped it for over a year, until Joe Biden came in and turned victory into defeat; until Joe Biden came in and offered complete capitulation—and might I note, in exchange for nothing.

Let me ask you, what did the Biden administration get in exchange for a multibillion-dollar gift—and not a one-time gift; a gift every year for decades in perpetuity? What did the Biden administration get? Not a damn thing. Nothing. It was simply a complete capitulation. Surrender.

Now, defenders of the Biden administration will say: Well, maybe we could have stopped it a few months ago, before the pipeline was complete. But in between January and this month, the Russian efforts built the pipeline, and they just announced it is complete. So now we should surrender, right? There is nothing that can be done about it.

Well, that, in fact, is not true. That is a second wave of disinformation. Now, why is that true? That is not true because before the pipeline can go online, there are a series of certifications that are required. Nord Stream 2 AG, the company that is responsible for

planning, construction, and eventual operation of Nord Stream 2, needs to be granted formal permission as a gas transmitter. There are many regulatory hurdles in their way—hurdles that have not yet been cleared. The process at a minimum should take many months, and the process could be derailed at any time.

First, there has to be an inspection process. Each of Nord Stream 2's strings has to be inspected to make sure there are no leaks, and part of that requires confirming that the pipelines were installed correctly. Part of that has already begun with air. Nobody knows how it has been going.

Then, there has to be an additional technical certification. This will be extremely difficult for Nord Stream 2 AG because the bipartisan sanctions legislation that I wrote and passed with Senator SHAHEEN and that Congress passed imposes mandatory sanctions on anyone who certifies the pipeline for operation.

Now, pause and think about that for a second. The pipeline can't go into effect unless it is certified. U.S. law passed overwhelmingly by Democrats and Republicans in this Congress, signed into law in the U.S. Code, says anyone who certifies it faces mandatory, crushing sanctions from the United States. The company that was originally going to certify it withdrew after the sanctions became law. The only way that a different company would dare to certify is if they believed the Biden administration would look the other way, would bless their certification in outright defiance of U.S. law.

Then, apart from the technical issues, Nord Stream 2 AG still has to be certified as a gas transmission operator as a matter of regulation and law. That should take at a minimum many months and require delicate negotiations between the company and the regulators.

You know, what is striking is, everything that I am saying has been said by the Biden administration. So right now, their talking points are "There is nothing we can do. It is a done deal. We have surrendered. We have given up. There is nothing we can do," but when they were in the process of surrendering, they said everything I just told you.

Until recently, even the top officials of the Biden administration acknowledged that physical completion of Nord Stream 2 didn't make its activation a fait accompli.

On June 8, Secretary of State Blinken testified that "even when the pipeline is physically complete, for it to go into operation, it still requires insurance, it still requires various permits, and we are looking very carefully at all of that." Secretary Blinken said that "it was too late to stop the joining of those pipes. Its operation is another matter."

Secretary Blinken was wrong when he said it was too late to stop the join-

ing of the pipes because we stopped them for over a year, until Biden surrendered to Putin, but he wasn't wrong when he said we could still stop the operation of it.

Given these requirements and this time line, the path for America is obvious: We should sanction Nord Stream 2 AG, the parent company of the Nord Stream 2 Pipeline. That will automatically isolate the company, and it will signal our readiness to follow the law, to impose more sanctions, and to ensure that everyone knows that involvement with Putin's pipeline brings with it crippling, company-ending sanctions. Indeed, that is exactly why Congress has repeatedly passed legislation—bipartisan legislation—to stop this pipeline. But instead of obeying the law, President Biden decided brazenly and willfully to defy Federal law—to defy Congress's mandate.

In May, President Biden transmitted a communication to Congress that acknowledged, yes, he was obliged to impose sanctions on Nord Stream 2 AG for violating the sanctions that Congress had passed and passed overwhelmingly, but instead of imposing those mandatory sanctions on Nord Stream 2 AG, given the clear and unequivocal intent of Congress, the Biden administration chose instead to waive them. It was a disastrous decision. It was a decision based on weakness and capitulation to Russia. It hurt our friends and allies in Europe, and it hurt the United States of America.

It is a decision that can be reversed. Right now, the pipeline, if this pipeline goes into effect, will be the Biden-Putin pipeline. It doesn't have to be. This was designed at the outset to be the Putin pipeline, and when it was the Putin pipeline, we stopped it. Republicans stopped it. Democrats stopped it. We came together at a time of partisan division and we said together: Giving billions of dollars to Putin, to Russia, for aggressive military hostility, subjecting Europe to energy blackmail, making Europe dependent on Putin's gas, and destroying American jobs is bad all around.

Congress succeeded. It was the Putin pipeline until January 24, 2021. Joe Biden had just been sworn into office, and Putin, after a year of dormancy, began building the pipeline again because Biden had already signaled he intended to capitulate.

When we convene next week, I am going to discuss in greater detail the compromise that I have offered to the Biden administration and Senate Democrats to move forward on more of their nominees if they accept a compromise solution on Nord Stream 2. The Biden administration has had this compromise offer for 2 months, and they have done nothing with it.

But I would suggest something right now. In the course of my remarks, I have read quote after quote after quote from Senate Democrats. Senate Democrats know this pipeline is a disaster for America. Senate Democrats know

that surrendering to Putin is bad for America. But Senate Democrats are scared to stand up to a Democratic President.

I can tell you, when we had a Republican President, President Trump, there were some in the Trump administration who resisted these bipartisan sanctions, and as a Republican, I was perfectly willing to stand up to a Republican administration for those who were resisting these sanctions and to press them hard.

So my request to my Democratic colleagues is, show that you actually believe what you said in 2019 and 2020 and 2021. Show that you care about U.S. national security. Let's stand together, and let's reclaim that bipartisan consensus we have had for 2 years that Nord Stream 2 is bad for America and bad for our allies.

I yield the floor.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Cloture having been invoked, the clerk will report the nomination.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Karen Erika Donfried, of the District of Columbia, to be an Assistant Secretary of State (European Affairs and Eurasian Affairs).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

NOMINATION OF MONICA P. MEDINA

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I would like to speak in support of Ms. Monica Medina's nomination to be Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs.

I have known Monica for more than 30 years and can say without a shred of doubt that she is the most qualified and competent candidate to fill this position. She has worked for decades across multiple administrations on issues of environmental law and policy. She understands well the interconnected world we live in and knows that 21st-century U.S. foreign policy goes not simply beyond the water's edge but to the seas and the skies and the sands of the world, where universal threats and their solutions lie.

Monica is a proven public servant through and through. Over the years, she has fought for what matters most. For example, during her time at the Defense Department, she worked to end discriminatory practices against women in the military, to provide them with opportunities that were previously closed to them simply because of their gender.

After her time at DOD, she continued the track record of fighting for what is most important by calling out the connection between illegal wildlife trafficking and organized criminal networks, confronting illegal fishing that is too often tied to global piracy and human rights violations.

Her expertise in globe-spanning threats to our national security is exactly why former Secretary of Defense